

Message Text

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ACTION EA-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-07

L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15

USIA-06 DHA-05 VO-03 INSE-00 /067 W

-----116569 080328Z /63

R 071018Z OCT 77

FM AMEMBASSY MANILA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6279

C O N F I D E N T I A L MANILA 16037

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, SHUM, RP

SUBJECT: LOPEZ/OSMENA ESCAPE EPILOGUE

REF: (A) MANILA 15637; (B) MANILA 15713; (C) MANILA 15737;

(D) MANILA 15794; (E) MANILA 15796

1. SUMMARY. AS THE LOPEZ/OSMENA ESCAPE FADES FROM THE MEDIA, WE REMAIN VIRTUALLY CERTAIN THAT THE GOP HAD NO HAND IN THE EPISODE. IT SEEMS CLEAR THAT MARCOS WILL NOT MAKE AN ISSUE OF THIS CASE WITH US BY DEMANDING THE RETURN OF THE ESCAPEES. HE PROBABLY SEES LITTLE OR NO ADVANTAGE IN DOING SO. HE CONCLUDE THAT THE AFFAIR SHOULD HAVE NO GREAT EFFECT ON THE COURSE OF US-PHILIPPINE RELATIONS. END SUMMARY.

2. THE " GREAT ESCAPE" OF THE LOPEZES AND OSMENA IS GRADUALLY MOVING OFF THE FRONT PAGES ALTHOUGH THE EPISODE CONTINUES TO PROVIDE GRIST FOR THE MANILA COCKTAIL MILL. THE MEDIA HAVE GIVEN THE AFFAIR MUCH ATTENTION, INCLUDING FULL AND RELATIVELY ACCURATE DETAILS OF THE ESCAPE ATTRIBUTED TO LOCAL, HONG KONG AND US BASED SOURCES. WITH THE PRESIDENT'S STATEMENT THAT HE DOES NOT INTEND TO SEEK THE RETURN OF THE ESCAPEES, PUBLIC SPECULATION TO THAT EFFECT HAS ENDED. THE EDITORIAL
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THEME OF THE GUIDED PRESS IS NOW ESSENTIALLY ONE OF "GOOD RIDDANCE."

3. WE REMAIN VIRTUALLY (ABOUT 90 PERCENT) CERTAIN THAT THE GOP HAD NOTHING TO DO WITH THE AFFAIR. A SHADOW OF DOUBT WILL PERSIST IN THIS BYZANTINE SOCIETY. COLUMNIST VALENCIA, FOR ONE, INSISTS ON PUTTING QUOTATION MARKS

AROUND THE WORD ESCAPE AND WRITES CRYPTICALLY THAT "EVERYBODY IS HAPPY" SINCE THE ESCAPE "SOLVED ALL THE UNSOLVABLE PROBLEMS FOR US." AND MANY MANILA RESIDENTS WILL NOT BE PERSUADED THAT THE GOP DID NOT HAVE A HAND IN THE MATTER. BUT ALL REAL SIGNS POINT TO THE CONTRARY. IT SHOULD BE ADDED THAT A GOOD MANY FILIPINOS CONTINUE TO CREDIT THE USG WITH ARRANGING THE ESCAPE, INCLUDING AQUINO'S SISTER.

4. IT SEEMS CLEAR NOW THAT MARCOS, AFTER A CERTAIN AMOUNT OF DELIBERATION, WILL NOT MAKE AN ISSUE OF THIS CASE WITH THE US. MARCOS WAS LIKELY UPSET BY THE ESCAPE AND ESPECIALLY PERHAPS BY THE REACTION OF M

V. MARCOS WHO REGARDS THE LOPEZ CLAN AS ENEMY NUMBER ONE (WE HEAR THAT IMELDA WAS ENRAGED WHEN SHE HEARD THE NEWS IN NEW YORK). MARCOS MAY POSSIBLY SUSPECT SOME USG CONNIVANCE ALTHOUGH THERE HAS BEEN NO SUGGESTION OF THIS FROM THE GOP. IN ANY CASE, MARCOS EVIDENTLY CONCLUDED THAT THERE IS NO PARTICULAR ADVANTAGE TO HIM IN PRESSING THE US TO RETURN THE ESCAPEES. ON THE CONTRARY, HE MAY WELL PERCEIVE SOME POTENTIAL GAIN OF US FAVOR BY ACTING AS EQUALLY AS HE HAS.

5. THIS GOP POSTURE OF RESTRAINT IS CONFIRMED BY A COMMENT EARLIER THIS WEEK BY IMMIGRATION COMMISSIONER REYES TO THE CONFIDENTIAL

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CHARGE. REYES MENTIONED THAT HE WAS SENDING TO THE US IMMIGRATION AND NATURALIZATION SERVICE, VIA THE EMBASSY, CERTAIN LEGAL DOCUMENTS RELATING TO THE PENDING TRIAL OF LOPEZ AND OSMENA AND THAT HE WANTED US TO KNOW "THIS IS STRICTLY FOR THE RECORD--WE ARE NOT ASKING ANYTHING OF THE US." THE CHARGE MUSED, "WHAT SHOULD WE DO WITH THE FILE, PUT IT IN AN ENVELOPE AND SEND IT TO WASHINGTON BY SLOW BOAT?" REYES REPLIED QUICKLY, "YES? BY SLOW BOAT." (MATERIAL TRANSMITTED BY MANILA AIRGRAM 237).

6. ON OCTOBER 5 VETERAN TIMES JOURNAL COLUMNIST VICENTE TANEDO WROTE OF THE LOPEZ/OSMENA ESCAPE: "APPARENTLY THE TWO GOVERNMENTS REGARD THIS AS A MINOR COG THAT IS NOT IRRITATING ENOUGH TO DISRUPT CONSIDERATION OF MORE SIGNIFICANT ISSUES." WE WOULD AGREE THAT THE AFFAIR SHOULD HAVE NO GREAT EFFECT ON THE COURSE OF US-RP RELATIONS NOR DETRACT FROM THE POSITIVE ATMOSPHERE DERIVING FROM THE RECENT HOLBROOKE VISIT AND HIGH LEVEL MEETINGS IN NEW YORK. TO ASSURE THIS, HOWEVER, WE WOULD OPT FOR THE PASSAGE OF SOME TIME BEFORE A DECISION IS TAKEN ON THE POLITICAL ASYLUM REQUESTS.

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01-Jan-1994 12:00:00 am
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: REFUGEES, GOVERNMENT REACTIONS
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Decaption Date: 01-Jan-1960 12:00:00 am
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 22 May 2009
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1977MANILA16037
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D770367-0779
Format: TEL
From: MANILA
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1977/newtext/t19771083/aaaacsub.tel
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Litigation Code IDs:
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Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
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Office: ACTION EA
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 77 MANILA 15637, 77 MANILA 15713, 77 MANILA 15737, 77 MANILA 15794, 77 MANILA 15796
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 24-Feb-2005 12:00:00 am
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 998093
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: LOPEZ/OSMENA ESCAPE EPILOGUE
TAGS: PINT, SHUM, RP, (LOPEZ, EUGENIO), (OSMENA, SERGE)
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odbc://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/286c5734-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
22 May 2009
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 22 May 2009